

Critics of a controversial copyright bill known as the Stop Online Piracy Act, or SOPA, are planning to announce an alternative proposal on Thursday, CNET has learned.

Their public discussion draft is intended to provide opponents of the Hollywood-backed SOPA bill, a list that includes much of Silicon Valley, with legislation that they can embrace as a less onerous way to delete "rogue" Web sites from the Internet.

Depending on the details, of course, the new legislation--backed by Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.)--could also be viewed as too restrictive.

The Wyden-Issa draft will narrow the definition of a rogue Web site and curb private lawsuits, a person familiar with the discussions told CNET. Representatives of both congressional offices confirmed to CNET that they expect to release the draft on Thursday.

SOPA represents the latest effort from the Motion Picture Association of America, the Recording Industry Association of America, and their allies to counter what their members view as rampant piracy on the Internet, especially offshore sites such as ThePirateBay.org. The measure would allow the Justice Department to seek a court order to be served on search engines, Internet providers, and other companies forcing them to make a suspected piratical Web site effectively vanish from the Internet.

A two-page summary (PDF) of the Wyden-Issa proposal released last week says that instead of awarding this broad Web deletion power to "a diversity of magistrate judges not versed in Internet and trade policy," placing it in "the hands of the International Trade Commission" is a better bet. Web sites that are "primarily" and "willfully" engaging in copyright infringement would be targeted, it says.

That summary doesn't list exactly what powers the International Trade Commission would receive, including whether it could order Domain Name System (DNS) providers to pretend the targeted Web site did not exist. That could affect the functioning of DNSSEC, a set of security improvements allowing digital signatures to be linked with domain names, a possibility that has led some technologists to oppose SOPA.

A vote on SOPA is expected to be held in the House Judiciary committee, chaired by SOPA champion Lamar Smith (R-Texas), this month.

Other politicians who have lent their support to the Wyden-Issa approach include senators Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), and Mark Warner (R-Va.), and representatives Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), **John Campbell (R-Calif.)**, Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas), Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.), Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.), and Jared Polis (D-Colo). Issa's support is crucial in a GOP-dominated House because he's a senior Republican and chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform committee.

Wyden has placed a hold on a less Draconian version of the bill in the Senate called Protect IP, saying it takes an "overreaching approach to policing the Internet when a more balanced and targeted approach would be more effective." That hold could be defeated through a cloture vote, a significant hurdle but not an insurmountable one.

Earlier this week, the MPAA highlighted an article on SOPA by Daniel Castro of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, who concluded that arguments against SOPA based on its negative impact on DNSSEC are "completely unfounded and without merit."

A guest column published today in Billboard by David Israelite, head of the National Music Publishers' Association, also downplayed concerns with SOPA, arguing that it will help in "choking off" foreign Web sites' ability to flout U.S. law.

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